

## **Part I - INTRODUCTION**

### **Foreword**

Several parcels under different ownerships were brought together in the late 1980s to form a 2,223-acre parcel northeast of Issaquah traditionally known as “Grand Ridge”. Under the original development proposal, 288 five-acre lots would have been created in an area designated “rural” in the 1990 King County Comprehensive Plan. Although the City of Issaquah attempted to annex the area before 1990 (and subsequently alter the potential land use), the rural designation remained in place until 1994. At that time an agreement was drawn up between the property owner, the City of Issaquah, and King County, setting forth the concept of a planned community concentrated on the west side of Grand Ridge, to be annexed to the City of Issaquah. This western portion of the property, designated “urban” with clustered development, was permitted an increase in density while on the eastern side a 230-acre parcel remained “rural” with five-acre lots. Of these acres, 150 will be developed with 40 homes and 180 will be set aside (in increments, as the lots are sold), as a conservation easement that will revert to King County ownership, although this land will not be available for public use. Out of the original acreage, roughly 1,200 acres were committed to open space for public use and additional acres were set aside as conservation easements or buffers. The 1,200 acres of public open space will be developed as Grand Ridge Park. A ratio of four-to-one was created, four acres of open space for every acre developed at greater density. (See **Figure 1 – Region/Location**)

Urban development on the west side of Grand Ridge Park, now known as the Issaquah Highlands, will provide high density housing that will be home to approximately 7,000 residents when construction is completed. Nearly four million square feet of commercial/retail space as well as an office campus are being created within the development and between 12,000 to 15,000 employees are expected to work in the area. This part of the property is within the urban boundary of the City of Issaquah. While open spaces and recreational facilities will be created within the developed area, most notably a 47-acre “Central Park” by the City of Issaquah, Grand Ridge Park will serve some of the recreation needs of the thousands of future residents and employees. For the rural development on the east side of the ridge, which is in unincorporated King County, recreation space has not been included due to the large lot size. A road has been built across a portion of the Park, connecting the two communities.

It is the open space that resulted from the four-to-one agreement that is the subject of this study: a north-south reaching parcel characterized by varied topography and second-growth mixed forest typical of the Puget lowlands. Although the area was logged early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has seen only minimal trail use since that time and has no active roads (with the exception of the new road linking the urban and rural sides of the Issaquah Highlands development). Other than stumps of cedar trees – still with spring board notches – and the proliferation of second-growth vegetation that follows logging, there is no indication of earlier uses. Access has been limited by very steep slopes along the site’s southern edge, by an extensive forested wetland along the northern edge, by a lack of roads and parking on the east, and dense vegetation on the west. The latter has largely been cleared for development and one road has been created from Issaquah Highlands into the Park to provide access to a water tower that serves the site. Undeveloped parcels further east are either preserved as forested open space, are held by private timber interests, or are in low-density residential development. Zoning to the east is rural, one dwelling unit per five acres.

For decades recreationists have used simple trails in the south-to-central portion of the site and before construction activities began at Issaquah Highlands, a few narrow trails traversed the property, allowing visitors to cross the central portion of the ridge. Some of the trails were along utility easements and others were created by hikers and equestrians. None extended all the way north to the Issaquah-Fall City Road. Bicyclists in recent years have taken advantage of trails along the steep slopes at the southern property edge for their recreational pursuits. With the creation of Issaquah Highlands many segments of trail were disrupted and the potential for a far greater number of visitors was increased.

The enabling legislation for the Park (created in 1993) cited its potential to serve recreational users, especially equestrians, through the development of onsite trails. Recreational use, however, will have to be minimal because of the number of sensitive areas and rather than providing extensive public access, ecosystem preservation will be emphasized instead. Due to experience with development adjacent to Cougar Mountain Wildland Park, one of the County's concerns will be to protect the site from encroachments and other illegal activities, especially along the Issaquah Highlands' edge. Prevention of erosion, preservation of wildlife habitat, and protection of wetlands and waterways are central to maintaining this site as a healthy transition zone between urban development to the west and rural parcels to the east. At the same time immediate neighbors and recreational visitors will be able to continue to enjoy this rural landscape on a limited trail system.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to provide a record of existing features of the Park and to create guidelines for future site use and trail development. This plan includes:

- Short and long term goals
- Location
- Description
- Passive recreation potential
- Connections to regional trails
- Site access and parking
- A site inventory and analysis of existing natural resources and land uses
- Trail corridor considerations
- Site management recommendations
- Site-wide issues

## **Goals**

Grand Ridge Park will be maintained as open space by King County Parks, in accordance with Parks policies and conditions established in the dedication of the site. Management will focus on protection and enhancement of natural systems: fish and wildlife habitats and corridors, water resources, and sensitive areas. Because of the site's historic trail use and because of the large number of people expected to live adjacent to the park in coming years, it will be necessary to provide access along a trail system that will guide visitors into and through the park in an appropriate manner. Both existing and proposed trails will be made to meet U.S. Forest Service (USFS) standards.

### *Short Term Goals*

- Provide attractive and well-marked "official" entry points into the Park
- Plan and build well-defined low-impact trail in the south-to-central portion of the Park using existing trail segments where possible, and create loop around central ridge where conditions are appropriate
- Eliminate existing trails that do not meet USFS trail design standards, that pass in to Issaquah Highlands, that are unsafe, or that impact sensitive areas
- To the extent possible, use volunteer labor guided by King County Parks staff to build trails
- Provide signage and other physical controls to direct public use in appropriate areas and to protect natural systems

### *Long Term Goals*

- Form partnerships with land-managing agencies to develop trails on adjacent public lands
- Undertake management practices that will promote the development of forest structure and biodiversity in cooperation with King County DNR
- Aid in forming non-profit volunteer groups such as Friends of Grand Ridge Group (especially from Issaquah Highlands) as well as Park Ambassadors, include all stakeholders in regular meetings to create annual goals, and work collaboratively to the greater good of the site
- Design and implement a site-specific enforcement program that highlights voluntary compliance to site rules and regulations
- Explore potential to extend trail north to Issaquah-Fall City Road with a connection to Duthie Hill Park
- Preserve the rural nature of the site in keeping with community wishes by preserving vegetation and limiting access
- Create connections to King County regional trails where possible

### **Location**

The southern site boundary is along a former railroad grade within the right-of-way for Interstate 90 (I-90) and the northern boundary extends just north of the Issaquah-Fall City Road. The site is outside King County's urban boundary as set under the Growth Management Act. Immediately adjacent to the southwest is the Issaquah Highlands development, the greater portion of which is within the urban boundary of the City of Issaquah. The 230-acre rural parcel on the southeast side of the Park is outside the urban boundary of both the City of Issaquah and King County. Less than a mile from the site's northwestern corner is the Klahanie development, a planned residential neighborhood of roughly 9,000 residents.

Approximately half way along the north-south axis of Grand Ridge Park, on the east side, is the McCormick/Mitchell Hill area, also in King County ownership. This area will be preserved as open space under the management of the DNR, with the County owning all development rights as part of a Transfer of Development Rights program. Together with the 1,200 acres of Grand Ridge, this area will be considered a greenway and wildlife corridor and will be managed for habitat and ecosystem preservation. North of the McCormick/Mitchell Hill area are three 40-acre parcels that are privately owned and are managed for forestry and further north are residential homes on five-acre lots. To the northeast several hundred acres are managed by Plum Creek Timber and Washington State DNR. Several groups, including Mountains-to-Sound Greenway, Issaquah Alps Trail Club, Washington State DNR, and King County, have a shared vision of preserving a corridor of wildlife habitat through this area that would serve as a connector to larger habitats in the region. (See **Figure 2 – Publicly Held Land**)

A large parcel near the center and immediately west of Grand Ridge is the former Black Nugget Ranch site, once a destination resort that offered recreational equestrian pursuits. Currently several homes exist in this area where zoning allows one dwelling unit per five acres.

South of I-90 is the state-owned Tiger Mountain Park, a working forest managed by Washington State DNR, where trails are available for recreational use. Access from this park to Grand Ridge is provided at the Highpoint underpass.

### **Description**

Because Grand Ridge Park was formed out of a larger parcel that allocated developable land for building, the site has an irregular shape and the boundary takes an unusual number of twists and turns, especially on the western edge. The Park also contains numerous sensitive areas such as wetlands, streams, and steep slopes that were considered unsuitable for development and now preclude extensive recreational use of the site. On a high

point between two watersheds, drainage flows either west to the Cedar River basin or east to the Snoqualmie River basin. A number of small, unnamed and intermittent streams drain the hillsides, some of which form the headwaters of three major creeks that drain offsite. Large wetland complexes are found in low-lying level areas and smaller wetlands are found along hillsides as seeps. Vegetation communities represent typical second-growth in the Puget lowlands. Large stands of mature conifers have been identified as well as stands of mature deciduous/coniferous trees. Evidence of wildlife is found throughout the site. See **Figure 3 – Existing Conditions**)

### **Passive Recreational Potential**

For many years Grand Ridge has offered trails for recreational use and with the advent of thousands of new residents to the immediate area, these trails should be prepared to accommodate additional visitors in a way that protects natural systems to the extent possible. In the south-to-central part of the site, where parking will be available, where trails already exist, and where access from the Issaquah Highlands is planned, improvements and extensions to trail segments should be laid out. Where possible, a trail segment that loops around the central ridge should be created to allow visitors access further into the site, providing them with greater opportunities for exploration and allowing them to return to their starting point.

With interpretive signs providing details of the site's wildlife and vegetation, the educational aspects of a trail can be highlighted and protection of these resources can be enhanced. Public understanding and appreciation of the Park will be an asset to the County's efforts to restore salmonids under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as well as essential to maintaining the ecological health of the greater watershed.

Where the site's former trail system has been disrupted by construction activities at Issaquah Highlands, steps should be taken to revegetate discontinued segments or to create barriers that would prevent their further use. A few of the existing trails in the southwest corner of the site show signs of erosion due to poor siting and location. Some of these trails will be improved and others will be closed off to prevent further erosion. Parks staff and Park Ambassadors will have to closely monitor edge conditions adjacent to Issaquah Highlands to prevent dumping, illegal access, and to watch for any resource degradation.

### **Connections to Regional Trails**

A Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) transmission line traverses the western side of Grand Ridge, passing through the Issaquah Highlands development. Under this power line is a dedicated King County trail that connects with other trails in the southwest corner of Grand Ridge Park as well as with the Klahanie Trail to the north. This has been used by bicyclists and equestrians in the past but because Issaquah Highlands is within the urban boundary of the City of Issaquah, equestrians will no longer be allowed as horses are not allowed on trails in urban areas. The Grand Ridge trail will connect with the BPA trail at the Central Park site in Issaquah Highlands, where parking will be provided for Grand Ridge Park users.

Northwest of the Issaquah-Fall City Road the East Plateau Trail is planned as a hard-surface trail that will extend east from its beginning just north of Lake Sammamish State Park, along SE 43<sup>rd</sup> Way. After climbing to the plateau it will follow an existing sewer easement as it heads east to Klahanie, passing through that development, then continuing further east to Duthie Hill Park. A future connection is planned that will link this East Plateau Trail north through Duthie Hill Park to an easement that will pass through the Trossachs residential development and on to Section 36, a King County Park roughly two miles north of the Issaquah-Fall City Road. A trail extending the full length of Grand Ridge Park would connect with the East Plateau Trail at Duthie Hill Park.

Along the southern edge of Grand Ridge is an old railroad grade that runs east-west for roughly two miles between High Point and the BPA power line corridor. Along this grade is a trail that currently provides access to informal trails at the southwestern corner of the Park site. From the western end of the old railroad grade a

connection is planned to extend the trail further west to Issaquah and Lake Sammamish, a link that will be made following development of the Sunset Interchange at I-90. Also planned is a trail extension further east from High Point that will connect with the Preston-Snoqualmie Trail. When funding allows, the creation of a new connection should be explored in the southeastern corner of Grand Ridge, one that would link a trail along the upper contours of the Ridge more directly with the High Point parking area. Potential also exists for a future connection to trails on Tiger Mountain to the south.

Several hundred acres of undeveloped properties extend east of Grand Ridge toward the Preston area. Many of these holdings are in public ownership and have potential to offer some low-impact trail use. They also provide important wildlife habitat and corridors. At present there are no organized, formal recreation facilities on the different holdings, but where trails wouldn't compromise wildlife habitat and waterways protection, they will be planned for limited trail use. The McCormick /Mitchell Hill property, adjacent to Grand Ridge to the east, is considered a timber resource and trees are available for harvest; however, a management plan has been created that includes stream and wetland buffers as well as reforestation. Some recreational trails will be created within this forested environment with potential to connect with Grand Ridge trails.

### **Site Access and Parking**

Access to Grand Ridge Park is limited. At the southern edge of the park site near High Point is a small gravel parking lot that opens on to the old railroad grade. Primarily used by mountain bicyclists, this lot is within the right-of-way for I-90 and is maintained by Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) work crews. Further development of this parking lot would be difficult due to the presence of the East Fork of Issaquah Creek, which forms the north and west edges of the lot. Removing trees here to create more space would be subject to regulations of the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and to concerns of WSDOT. Site users could also park along the south side of I-90, either along SE 79<sup>th</sup> or at the High Point trail head to Tiger Mountain, south of the freeway. Horse trailers could park south of I-90 in the parking lot for Tiger Mountain. Access into the interior of Grand Ridge along most of this southern section is difficult because of the topography that rises steeply from the old railroad grade.

A second point of entry has been from the BPA easement at the southwest corner of the site. This will be developed further as one of the Park's main access points when the City of Issaquah builds a public park on 47 acres immediately east of the powerline easement. The city's park will be built largely to serve residents of the Issaquah Highlands development with active recreation fields, but it will also include 20 parking stalls for Grand Ridge visitors.

On the rural east side of the Issaquah Highlands is a trail access point that has traditionally been used by the local community. No improvements are planned here because of the wetlands and streams as well as steep slopes and landslide hazards in the area. A narrow road with limited site distance and a right-angle turn on this east side largely serves local residents. It is recommended that the county post "No Parking" signs here to prevent further use of this area. Entry here is on Issaquah Highlands property.

Access to the site's northern end is constrained by the presence of a large wetland complex south of the Issaquah-Fall City Road and a lack of parking. The only feasible site for parking in this area is Duthie Hill Park, a King County Park of 120 acres that lies north of the Issaquah-Fall City Road. The park was formerly leased by the Cedar River Bowmen who have since moved to a new location and the site is currently undeveloped. It has fairly level upper terrain and gentle slopes to the west, north, and east. It has some open fields suitable for development of recreational features, particularly for equestrian facilities. The eastern side of the park is adjacent to the Cleveland Memorial Forest, a Seattle Public Schools property used for environmental education. The County also owns a narrow parcel that extends north to Duthie Hill Road from the park. Currently this parcel is used by King County as a holding facility for salvaged plants but it could serve for a future trail route that would connect Grand Ridge further north and on to Section 36. At the time of this writing no funding has been allocated for development of recreation facilities at Duthie Hill Park.

Three access points are being created from Issaquah Highlands. The northern most point will be along a service road that leads to a one million gallon water reservoir (located within Park boundaries) at the 1250-foot level that will serve the development. A second access point will be at the road connecting the east and west (urban and rural) sides of Issaquah Highlands and a third will be in the southwest corner of the Park where an existing trail historically crossed into what is now part of the Issaquah Highlands development.